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September 27, 2008

Honorable Mary Landrieu
United States Senator
724 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Landrieu:

Louisiana rice producers and their families have been hit by severe weather in recent weeks, as you know firsthand, and need assistance to recover. The Louisiana Rice Producers' Group, which represents all Louisiana rice-producer organizations, strongly supports and deeply appreciates your work to provide disaster assistance to those families who have suffered losses for a crop that was so expensive to plant and will be even more expensive to harvest. Rice farm families who were affected have taken a serious hit to their near and long term financial viability. The communities where they live and local, state, and national economies also will be affected.

Hurricanes Gustav's and Ike's paths through parts of Louisiana devastated a number of rice producers and their 2008 crops. Rice is or has been under water or lodged in many fields for some time. In some areas, thousands of rice acres were flooded, with some draining slowly and others unable to drain in a timely manner due to flood-swollen waterways. A number of these acres will be a total loss.

When Gustav and Ike struck, harvest had been underway in South Louisiana, with many of those rice-producing parishes still having rice in the field. In Northeast Louisiana, rice harvest had not begun or had just started, leaving the crop very vulnerable to strong winds and heavy rain. For rice that is still able to be harvested, its field and milling yields likely will be diminished significantly, in particular rice that was under water, lodged, or shattered in the field, if it is able to be salvaged at all. Saltwater intrusion also would devastate rice to be harvested and damage soils in already-harvested fields that were inundated with it.

The storms' devastation has spiked the cost to harvest the damaged 2008 rice crop that remains in the field, on top of an already very costly planting and growing season, due to record-high fuel and fertilizer costs. Fuel costs to harvest downed rice in waterlogged fields, which is a very slow process, and dry it, will increase considerably for those experiencing these conditions.

Disease-related problems will further lessen crop quality. Rice stored in bins that received water and could not be dried promptly due to loss of electrical power also would be exposed to serious damage. Furthermore, the cost to repair farm infrastructure and restore rice fields to acceptable 2009 planting conditions, due to deep troughs and ruts caused during the 2008 harvest, will add to affected farmers' costs.

The Louisiana Rice Producers' Group thanks you for your leadership and dedication to help rice farm families recover from the 2008 storm disasters. Help is needed now. Please call on us at any time if we can assist you in response to these very difficult conditions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Jackie Loewer".

Jackie Loewer
Chairman
Louisiana Rice Producers' Group